

Message Text

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AMEMBASSY KINSHASA

AMEMBASSY LAGOS

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AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

AMEMBASSY ROME

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 MOSCOW 8047

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, UR, XA

SUBJECT: RHODESIA AND NAMIBIA-- THE VIEW FROM MOSCOW

REF: (A) ROME 7451 (NOTAL), (B) MOSCOW 7137 (NOTAL),
(C) MOSCOW 7663 (NOTAL)

1. SUMMARY. IN THE WAKE OF THE SECRETARY'S OFFICIAL
VISIT, SOVIET POLICY TOWARD SOUTHERN AFRICA APPEARS TO
BE IN A HOLDING PATTERN AS POLICY-MAKERS ASSESS THE
IMPACT OF THE NEW U.S. INITIATIVES AND EVALUATE THE
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POTENTIAL COSTS IN OTHER AREAS WHICH COULD RESULT FROM

MORE AGGRESSIVE MOVES IN THE REGION. OFFICIAL SOVIET POLICY STRESSES THE NEED, AND SUPPORTS THE SEARCH, FOR A PEACEFUL EVOLUTION TOWARD MAJORITY RULE IN RHODESIA AND NAMIBIA. HOWEVER, THERE ARE VEILED INDICATIONS THAT THE MILITARY OPTION IS NOT ANATHENA TO MOSCOW, AND AT SOME POINT -- NOT NECESSARILY ON THE IMMEDIATE HORIZON -- THE SOVIETS MAY DECIDE THAT THEIR INTERESTS ARE BETTER SERVED BY A MORE ACTIVE ROLE IN SUPPORT OF THE "LIBERATION MOVEMENTS" OPERATING IN SOUTHERN AFRICA. BUT AT LEAST FOR THE MOMENT, THE SOVIETS HAVE BEEN LED TO ASSUME A CAUTIOUS, WAIT-AND-SEE STANCE BY THE INCREASINGLY VOLATILE SITUATION IN ANGOLA, CONCERN OVER A POSSIBLE BACKLASH AMONG AFRICANS WHO MIGHT OPPOSE A DOMINANT OR EVEN SIGNIFICANT SOVIET ROLE IN SOUTHERN AFRICA,, AND A GROWING REALIZATION THAT FURTHER SERIOUS DAMAGE COULD BE DONE TO THE DETENTE RELATIONSHIP SHOULD MOSCOW UNDERTAKE A MORE AGGRESSIVE POLICY. END SUMMARY.

2. PRAGMATISM SEEMS TO US TO HAVE THE UPPER HAND AT THE MOMENT IN DETERMINING SOVIET VIEWS ON THE PREFERRED EVOLUTION OF THE SITUATION IN RHODESIA AND NAMIBIA. BREZHNEV CONTENTED IN HIS 25TH CONGRESS SPEECH THAT IDEOLOGY DICTATES MOSCOW'S SUPPORT FOR NATIONAL LIBERATION MOVEMENTS (NLM) IN GENERAL, AND IPSO FACTO SOVIET SUPPORT EXTENDS TO THOSE "LEGITIMATE" NLM'S WHICH ARE GRADUALLY TAKING THE FIELD AGAINST THE SMITH REGIME, SWAPO IN NAMIBIA, AS WELL AS THOSE WHICH, WE PRESUME, COULD EVENTUALLY BRING DIRECT PRESSURE TO BEAR ON THE LEADERS IN PRETORIA. BUT COUNTERVAILING REALITIES, SUCH AS THE INCREASING INTERNAL CONFUSION AND DISSENT WITHIN THE LEADERSHIP IN ANGOLA, INDICATIONS OF AFRICAN CONCERN RE SOVIET "HEGEMONY" IN SOUTHERN AFRICA, AND PERHAPS ABOVE ALL A STRONG RELUCTANCE TO RISK PLACING THE FINAL STRAW ON THE DETENTE CAMEL'S BACK, FORCE THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP TO ASSESS THE COST OF AN IDEOLOGICALLY-MOTIVATED CRUSADE IN SOUTHERN AFRICA IN REAL-WORLD TERMS. FROM WHAT WE SEE IN MOSCOW, THE SOVIETS SEEM TO BE CONCLUDING THAT THEY CANNOT, FOR THE MOMENT AT LEAST, PAY THE PROBABLY PRICE.

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3. ALTHOUGH WE HAVE LITTLE HARD INFORMATION ABOUT SOVIET ACTIVITIES ON THE GROUND IN ANGOLA, MOZAMBIQUE, RHODESIA, OR NAMIBIA, THE OFFICIAL SOVIET POLICY ESPOUSED TO US AND OTHER WESTERN REPRESENTATIVES HERE REFLECTS THIS CAUTIOUS APPROACH. IN RECENT DISCUSSIONS WITH AN ITALIAN DELEGATION (REF A), THE SOVIETS EXUDED MODERATION AND PROFESSED TO SUPPORT THE SEARCH FOR A PEACEFUL SOLUTION TO THE RHODESIAN PROBLEM.

LIKewise, DURING A MAY 12 CALL, GERGE M. BELAYEV, CHIEF OF THE BRITISH SECTION OF THE MFS'S SECOND EUROPEAN DEPARTMENT, TOLD AN EMBOFF THAT THE POSITION OF THE USSR WAS TO SUPPORT FULLY A PEACEFUL TRANSFER OF POWER IN RHODESIA AND NAMIBIA. THE BASIS FOR SUCH A TRANSFER, HE ADDED, WAS THE STRICT FULFILLMENT OF ALL UN RESOLUTIONS, AS WELL AS THE RESULTS OF NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN THE SMITH REGIME AND THE AFRICAN OPPOSITION ORGANIZATIONS.

4. CONCEIVABLY THERE IS A POINT AT WHICH MOSCOW WOULD DECIDE THAT ITS INTERESTS WERE NOT BEING SERVED BY A "PEACEFUL" SOLUTION, AND WOULD UNDERTAKE MORE ENERGETIC ACTIONS DESIGNED TO SUPPORT LESS PEACEFUL MODES OF STRUGGLE. WE ARE CONFIDENT THAT MOSCOW WOULD BE RELUCTANT TO TAKE STEPS TO SABOTAGE ANY NEGOTIATIONS WHICH SEEMED TO BE SHOWING SIGNS OF SUCCESS. BUT IT NEVERTHELESS IS PERHAPS SIGNIFICANT THAT ONE OF THE MAJOR THREADS CONSISTENTLY RUNNING THROUGH THE SOVIET MEDIA CONDEMNATION OF THE SECRETARY'S AFRICA VISIT WAS THAT HE REFUSED TO PLEDGE U.S. MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO THE NLM'S IN RHODESIA AND NAMIBIA. THE LOGICAL INFERENCE IS THAT THE MILITARY OPTION IS ACCEPTABLE TO THE SOVIETS, EVEN THOUGH IT DOES NOT NOW SEEM TO BE AT THE TOP OF THEIR LIST. INDEED, THE ITALIANS WERE TOLD, AND BELAYEV REPEATED, THAT MOSCOW HELD THE VIEW THAT THE NLM'S HAD THE RIGHT TO USE "ALL MEANS POSSIBLE" IN THEIR STRUGGLE TO ACHIEVE MAJORITY RULE. THE SOVIETS HAVE CONSISTENTLY STATED, HOWEVER, THAT AN ARMED STRUGGLE IS THE "LAST MEANS" WHICH SHOULD BE EMPLOYED IN THESE PARTICULAR CONFLICTS. WHERE THESE TWO LINES ON THE LIBERATION GRAPH MIGHT INTERSECT REMAINS TO BE SEEN. CONFIDENTIAL

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5. ONE ELEMENT OF THE EQUATION WHICH MAKES IT DIFFICULT FOR THE SOVIETS TO LURCH OFF ON A CRUSADE AT THE MOMENT IS THAT MOSCOW APPARENTLY HAS NOT YET DECIDED WHICH HORSE TO BACK IN THE RHODESIAN NLM SWEEPSTAKES. BELAYEV STATED FLATLY THAT "EVEN THOUGH THERE ARE CONTROVERSIES IN THE AFRICAN NATIONAL COUNCIL, AND IT WOULD BE BETTER IF THE GROUPS WERE UNITED," THE SOVIET UNION HAS "NO PREFERENCE" FOR ONE GROUP OVER ANOTHER. THE SAME THEME WAS HEARD DURING ANOTHER RECENT DISCUSSION BETWEEN EMBOFF AND SOVIET ACADEMICIAN DMITRY PENZIN AT THE ACADEMY OF SCIENCES' CONFIDENTIAL

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AFRICAN INSTITUTE. MOREOVER, ALTHOUGH THE SOVIETS TOLD THE ITALIAN DELEGATION THAT MOSCOW SUPPORTED JOSHUA NKOMO AS THE PRINCIPAL INDIGENOUS LEADER IN RHODESIA, V. KUDRYAVTSEV, IN HIS LENGTHY COMMENTARY BLASTING U.S. POLICY IN AFRICA (REF B), REFERRED TO NKOMO AS "ONE OF THE LEADERS" OF THE LIBERATION MOVEMENT IN "ZIMBABWE", AND SEEMINGLY DEPRECATED NKOMO'S PARTICIPATION IN THE "SO-CALLED CONSTITUTIONAL NEGOTIATIONS" WITH SMITH. THUS, THIS APPARENT INDECISION

OVER WHOM TO BACK IN RHODESIA-- IN STARK CONTRAST TO THE SOVIET POSITION REGARDING THE MPLA IN ANGOLA, AND, TO A LESSER EXTENT, SWAPO IN NAMIBIA-- COULD CONCEIVABLY BE ACTING AS A STRONG, ALBEIT TRANSITORY, BRAKE ON SOVIET ACTIONS IN RHODESIA.

6. ANOTHER INDICATION OF CAUTION/INDECISION IN PRESENT SOVIET THINKING, IS THE CONSISTENT AVOIDANCE BY OFFICIALS AND ACADEMICIANS OF DISCUSSION OF THE POTENTIAL CUBAN ROLE IN SOUTHERN AFRICA. BELAYEV, FOR EXAMPLE, INSISTED THAT ANY CUBAN INVOLVEMENT IN THE RHODESIAN STRUGGLE WOULD BE A MATTER BETWEEN CUBA AND "THE GOVERNMENT OF ZIMBABWE." SOVIET SILENCE ON THIS SUBJECT MAY STEM FROM A WARINESS THAT THE CUBANS IN AFRICA ARE NOT SECURELY ON A SOVIET LEASH (EITHER SHORT OF LONG), AND THE SOVIETS THEREFORE ARE CONCERNED THAT THE CUBANS MIGHT POSSIBLY LAUNCH OPERATIONS WHICH COULD SERIOUSLY DISRUPT MOSCOW'S OVERALL PLANS. WHILE A TOUGH "OBSERVER" COMMENTARY (REF C) IN PRAVDA STRONGLY DEFENDED THE "LEGITIMACY" OF CUBA'S INTERVENTION IN

ANGOLA-- INDEED MOSCOW NOW HAS LITTLE CHOICE BUT DEFEND THAT CUBAN ROLE--IT CONTAINED NO HINT THAT FURTHER "LEGITIMATE" CUBAN INTERVENTIONS ELSEWHERE IN AFRICA WOULD BE WELCOMED BY MOSCOW.

7. IN SHORT, WE BELIEVE THAT MOSCOW IS SITTING BACK AT THE MOMENT, ASSESSING THE RESULTS OF THE SECRETARY'S VISIT TO AFRICA AND KEEPING A WARY EYE ON THE PROGRESS OF THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN IN THE U.S. THE SOVIET COMMITMENT TO ASSIST NLM'S IS A REAL ONE, AND IS VIEWED BY THE KREMLIN AS FUNDAMENTAL TO ITS IDEOLOGICAL
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CONCEPTION OF "IMPERIALISM" AND THE "THIRD WORLD," AND "THE SHIFTING CORRELATION OF FORCES." BUT MOSCOW OBVIOUSLY IS NOT PREPARED TO PURSUE THIS COMMITMENT AT ANY COST, AND THE STRONG U.S. REACTION TO SOVIET ACTIONS IN ANGOLA HAS DEMONSTRATED THAT THE COST IS HIGHER THAN MOSCOW HAD ORIGINALLY CALCULATED.
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